

a sexual woman without breasts was a painful adjustment. Time, therapy, research, and talking to other women all helped, and each healthy year that passes helps even more.

Women have talked to me about needing more intimacy, tenderness, and reassurance after breast cancer. Both men and women can be equally threatened by the illness as well as by the loss and disfigurement of a mastectomy or quadrantectomy. If breasts were a major source of erotic stimulation for either partner, the impact is considerable.

Many women have used change to put themselves back on track. For some, that has meant counseling, support groups, visualization, or meditation; others have used dietary changes and alternative medical approaches. Some women shed unhappy marriages or take up new careers—they re-evaluate their lives.

Women diagnosed with breast cancer often resolve the

crisis through a clarification of values, accompanied by an increased sense of immediacy and a greater appreciation of life. I know that I will never be the same person I was, physically or emotionally. I have found that sadness, depression, and generalized anxiety have given way to a reordering of my priorities and plans for my life. Nietzsche sums it up quite well: "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

SUGGESTED READING

The Breast Cancer Digest—A Guide to Medical Care, Emotional Support, Education Programs, and Resources. US Dept of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD 20205

Frankel MR, Canepa L: Telling your kids you have cancer or any serious illness. Medical Self-Care 1988 Sep-Oct: 37-41

Morra M, Potts E: Choices. New York, Avon, 1980

Subak-Sharpe G: Overcoming Breast Cancer. New York, Doubleday, 1987

Weitzman S, Kuter I, Pizer HF: Confronting Breast Cancer—New Options in Detection and Treatment. New York, Vintage Books, 1987

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ALIGNMENT

*She shaves her legs daily:
She never nicks her knee,
Doesn't miss a patch—
She spills no blood.*

*In her closet shoes
Are evenly paired, toes out,
None need polishing.*

*Automatically at tables
She lines up silverware,
The fork perfectly centered
Where the napkin was.*

*Now we sit on stiff chairs,
A waiting room.
She resists an impulse
To re-align the magazines.
Taut sides of upper arms
Press inward
On presently balanced breasts.*

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